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The Inauguration of Abraham Lincoln

A Reminder to the Youthful Student

BY GILBERT PATTERSON BROWN

WITHOUT question, Abraham Lincoln was one of the most unique men since Jesus, the carpenter's son. Son of a drinking man, brought up by a tender-hearted stepmother, stood Lincoln, the man of honor, before all national messengers of his generation. No church could claim him within its folds, nor could the political expert have power over this distinguished American.

On March 4, 1861, at high noon, amid a throng of people, an open barouche drove up to the Pennsylvania Avenue entrance of Willard's Hotel, in the city of Washington. Its single occupant was "a large, heavy, awkward-looking man, far advanced in years, with short and thin gray hair, full face, plentifully scamed and wrinkled, head curiously inclined to the left shoulder, a low-crowned, broad-brimmed silk hat, an immense white cravat, like a poultice, thrusting his old-fashioned collar up to his ears, dressed in black throughout, with a swallow-tailed coat not of the newest style." This was President Buchanan, come to escort Abraham Lincoln, President-elect, to the capitol, where he was to take the oath of office. Mr. Buchanan typified the end of a political era, as Lincoln typified the beginning of a new one.

The good Pennsylvanian, who had fought in the War of 1812, whose chief hope for months had been to end his administration in peace, and the tall, vigorous man of fifty-two from the Illinois prairies, came out of the hotel arm in arm, and in the presence of a gazing crowd, held back by a line of militia, entered the broadway, and were driven up the avenue toward the capitol. The day was fine, with the brilliant, genial sunshine that spring sometimes brings thus early in that latitude. There was no demonstration of the carriage and its escort—described as "a rather disorderly and certainly not very imposing procession"—proceeded toward the capitol. Yet there were many dark faces in the crowd on either side of the way, and on the roofs of various houses, in commanding positions, were coveys of squalls of sharpshooters, stationed by General Scott, with explicit orders to guide them in case of disturbances in the street.

Treason was on all sides, but the honest Lincoln was true to the issues of the hour. In this so-called Christian nation the event was a most pitiful one. The outgoing party had but little sympathy for the incoming one. Many men forgot their true manhood and put party before their nation, as to-day many Christians put their creed before religion.

Lincoln was deeply a religious man; few clergymen of his generation were better read on Bible matters than the fearless man of the hour.

Many had feared that Lincoln would be

harmful in person on his trip to the nation's capital, for threats had been made that he should never be inaugurated, and General Winfield Scott, as commander of the army, had employed all the arm he could secure from the army and militia to guard the line of march and the capitol. Yet nothing untoward occurred, and shortly after one o'clock Abraham Lincoln and

Lincoln and her three sons, Chief Justice Taney of the Supreme Court, who was to administer the oath, and the clerk of the Senate bearing a Bible, proceeded to the east front of the capitol, where a platform had been erected over the steps, with a sort of open wooden shed on it. In this little structure an epochal event in American history now took place. The greatest American of his time here took up the heaviest responsibilities that had ever fallen on the shoulders of a President. Here he was to enunciate the lofty principles that were to enable him to guide the nation through its severest trials. The chief features of the scene have become a familiar part of American history. Pictures have preserved the appearance of the platform, of the unfinished capitol

Near the President sat Stephen A. Douglas, the "little giant" of the Democrats, who had been one of Lincoln's opponents in the election as a candidate of the Northern Democrats for the presidency. He had come to greet the incoming President, in order to show the country that, in spite of his political views, he was for the Union. Probably no act of his political life was to do more to secure Douglas an honorable place in history. Chief Justice Taney, that upright man, had also taken a leading part in the prelude to the great drama now opening. He was the author of the opinion delivered by the Supreme Court in the celebrated Dred Scott case, declaring that property in slaves could not be interfered with by Congress in the Territories, an opinion that had done more than any other single cause to bring about the crisis the country was now facing. Judge Taney was eighty-four, but he still held the views that had aided him in this decision with the slave-holding interest.

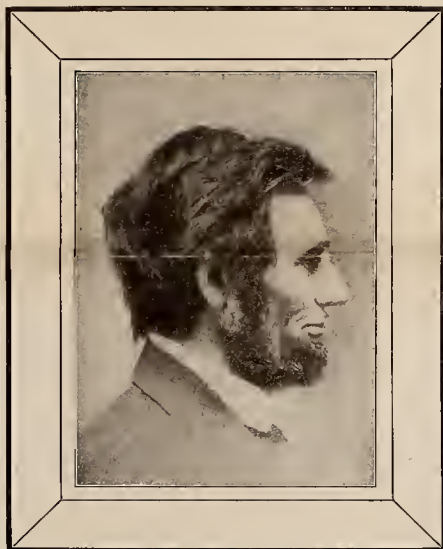
There were but few shows when the official party arrived on the platform. Enthusies of Lincoln and the North were plentiful in the crowd. The friends of the President did not wish to irritate them by cheering. Every loyal nerve was tense, and every loyal heart hoped there would be no outbreak—no tragedy.

As the tall and homely looking Lincoln came forward, observers close to him saw that he had made a departure from his usual easy style of dress. He wore a new suit, his usual frock coat having given place to a dress coat. His waistcoat was of black satin, his trousers black, his hat a black beaver, and he carried a large ebony cane with a gold head. On arriving at his place Mr. Lincoln looked about for a place for his hat, and, finding none, was about to deposit it on the floor, when Mr. Douglas came to the rescue of his old rival and took the hat which he continued to hold. Lincoln then thrust his cane into a corner of the railing and was ready to speak.

The unique honor of introducing Lincoln fell to Edward B. Baker, of Oregon, a veteran of the Mexican War, then in the Senate, who was destined to die in battle for the Union within eight months. Lincoln had not spoken long when his hearers became conscious that they were listening to a new note in official utterances. No longer was there any tone of compromise with secession. Lincoln declared solemnly:

"I consider that, in view of the Constitution and the laws, the Union is unbroken, and to the extent of my ability I shall take care as the Constitution itself expressly enjoins upon me, that the laws of the Union be faithfully executed in all the States. Doing this I deem to be only a simple duty on my part, and I shall perform it, so far as I am able, unless my rightful masters, the American people, shall withhold the requisite means, or in some authoritative manner direct the contrary." The solemn, judicial tone of his address and the clear, resonant voice of the speaker, trained in the West by long practice in out-of-door oratory, made a profound but not a hostile impression.

There could be no doubt that he would do his utmost to preserve the Union, while his attitude toward the South was unequiv-



James Buchanan arrived before the capitol, then an unfinished building, with a portion of the front obscured by a litter of staves, derricks, and building material.

The official party proceeded to the Senate chamber, which was crowded with dignitaries, including the entire diplomatic corps, to witness the ceremony of swearing in the Vice-President-elect, Hannibal Hamlin, of Maine. This ceremony performed, Mr. Lincoln, accompanied still by President Buchanan, and followed by Mrs.

done above with a derrick towering near, of the crowd on the level below, and of the tall, gaunt figure of Lincoln delivering his inaugural address.

Many writers of that time have left an intimate description of the appearance of the persons on the platform. They were actors calculated to give a dramatic value to the scene, if any were needed beyond that imparted by the presence of the plain, strong man from the far interior of the country, called hither to save the nation.

A Double Emancipation

"AND when the victory shall be complete—when there shall be neither a slave nor a drunkard on the earth—how proud the title of that land which may truly claim to be the birthplace and cradle of both those revolutions that shall have ended in that victory. How nobly distinguished that people who shall have planted and nurtured to maturity both the political and moral freedom of their species."—Abraham Lincoln.

Springfield, Illinois, February 22, 1842.

